



April 23, 2018

Co-Chair, Representative Joel Kitchens
10 West
State Capitol
PO Box 8952
Madison, WI 53708

Co-Chair, Senator Luther Olsen
Room 122 South
State Capitol
PO Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707

Re: Blue Ribbon Commission on School Funding and independent charter school equity gap.

Dear members of the Blue Ribbon Commission,

We appreciate the creation of this joint commission of the state legislature and we applaud your efforts and goals. We agree it is long overdue to revisit and address how education is funded. In doing so we believe it is important to recognize current success in some of our toughest populations and communities where charter schools are succeeding. It is our recommendation for this commission to begin reducing the largest funding gap in the country and decrease the funding gap for public charter school students by funding them at 80% of the funding school districts receive from the State of Wisconsin for state and local property taxes.

Public charter school enrollment in Milwaukee schools authorized by MPS, UWM and the City of Milwaukee, have been on the rise since 1993. The local trends are comparable to the national scene; since 2004 the total number of public charter schools has nearly doubled to 7,000 and the total number of students enrolled in public charter schools tripled to 2.7 million. While traditional district schools nationwide have battled declining enrollment year after year, public charter schools in Milwaukee have grown to nearly 16% of all children educated in the city. Today one in every six students in Milwaukee are educated in a public charter school.

When academically compared to their peers in Milwaukee, on average, public charter schools far outperform traditional public schools. In 2016 the reading proficiency level students in a traditional Milwaukee public school was 20.1% of students. Independent charter schools had an average proficiency level of 25.5%, and MPS non-instrumentality charter schools had an average proficiency level of 29.9%.

Milwaukee and Wisconsin follow suit in the national funding trends and disparities. According to the Center for Education Reform (CER), nationwide, public charter schools on average receive nearly one-third less funding per-pupil when compared to their local traditional public schools. Based on the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools annual report, Wisconsin ranks No. 38 (out of 45) and consistently ranks at the very bottom in terms of “equitable funding.” If given a letter grade for revenue disparity per student, the University of Arkansas’s Department of Education Reform, would give Wisconsin an “F” with a funding gap of \$4,568 and receiving 36% less than what traditional public school students receive in the city of Milwaukee.

Unfortunately, the comparatively low level of per-pupil funding received by charter schools has challenged even the best charter schools in Milwaukee. Expansion is being squeezed, rather than incentivized and parent options could seriously erode over time. State funding policy is not equitable. Our goal of closing the funding gap is aimed at creating sustainable quality schools. We ask this commission to make a formal recommendation to the Wisconsin state legislature to begin reducing the largest funding gap in the country and decrease the funding gap for charter school students to 80% of the funding school districts receive from the state of Wisconsin for state and local property taxes.

Sincerely,

Milwaukee Charter Advocates Board of Directors

Danae Davis
Milwaukee Succeeds

Ricardo Diaz
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Milwaukee Collegiate Academy

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